Interview with Mary Louise Weiss

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Program Foreign Service Spouse Series

MARY LOUISE WEISS:

Interviewed by: Monique Wong

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This is Monique Wong on August 13, 1992. I'm going to be interviewing Mary Louise Weiss at home for the Foreign Service Spouse Oral History, Incorporated.

Q: Mary Louise, you and your husband entered the foreign service in 1956 under something called the Wriston program. Can you tell me a little bit more about that program?

WEISS: Yes, that's what was called Wristonization in the foreign service. Prior to that the foreign service basically was posted abroad for almost unlimited lengths of time. They didn't have home leaves so they weren't allowed to come home. The spent a lot of time abroad and evidently were not required to come back at regular intervals. As a result, they somewhat lost touch with the updating of American society and official workings in the department.

Wristonization was to change all that by setting up a kind of revolving personnel system. Foreign service officers abroad had an opportunity on a regular basis, every two years, to come back to the department and go right into jobs that were foreign policy related.

Q: So, somewhat like an exchange program.

WEISS: In a way, a revolving one. So the people in the department who were filling those jobs that the foreign service coming back would have to fit into, the personnel here, the civil service personnel, were told they had to decide if they wanted to become foreign service or not. If they did, they would be assigned abroad on a rotating basis. If they did not, they would be in jeopardy of losing their position or being bumped in the job they were holding when a foreign service officer would be returned to Washington. They'd have to find a place for him. The civil servant's career and job were really in jeopardy.

Q: So, in other words, your husband was a civil servant?

WEISS: He was in the civil service. He was in the State Department for, I guess, about 12 years, in the economic part of it, international trade. And at that time we had just moved into a new house. We had a new baby and a little child, and we weren't quite mentally prepared for this sudden decision. So it took us a while. I think we had about a year to decide., and it was back and forth. Every night or so we made a different decision.

Q: So it was a difficult decision for you.

WEISS: It was somewhat difficult domestically, you might say. But, on the other hand, we had always thought that perhaps in the future we would be interested in foreign service, so there was that aspect also. And our friends were having to make decisions, too.

Q: Your friends in the foreign service. I mean, in the civil service

WEISS: I remember long conversations on the phone with Janet _____, for example, who was in the same position, little children. So we [debated] with each other, yes and no for quite a while, and finally we decided yes.

Then, being brand new at all of this, we had to learn about what do we do with the house. As I look back on it and read some of the material, it seems to me that it was no more of an adjustment than any new foreign service wife like yourself and your husband going

to a first post. It's an adjustment. You adapt. It's new. It's strange. You don't know what's ahead for you. For a while you don't know what post you're going to get. So having that decision made, I think it was no different for me than for a new foreign service officer in the old days, or even now.

Q: Did you get any sort of help from, perhaps, talking to foreign service wives or family in preparation for your decision or going overseas?

WEISS: Yes, there was some of that. There's much more now, but there was a wives' course at the Foreign Service Institute. It was more social, socially oriented, a panel of senior foreign service wives. How many glasses should she take? That sort of thing. We got a lot of protocol on calling and calling cards and that sort of thing, and entertaining. There were no offers for language study at that time. Nothing really more substantive. So I think that we used post reports. It was on a much smaller scale than is now available at the briefing center.

Q: But there were some post reports at the time.

WEISS: There were post reports, and I think also that the new wife would write to her counterpart at the post. Len was going to be the economic counselor in Belgrade. So I wrote to the wife there and asked questions about the schools, about clothing, entertaining, things that might not be in the post report that would be more personal. And I think we did that in other posts. It was a nice thing to do. It introduced you to someone before you arrived. I think we wrote to the ambassador's wife as kind of a courtesy thing so that when we arrived, there was a little connection.

I had a cousin, Janet Barker, who had gone into the foreign service herself right after she graduated from Vassar; and she had twin daughters and she'd been in the foreign service, by this time in the 50s, she'd been to several posts, and she gave me a lot of very helpful advice about traveling by boat and what to take when you have little children. If you're

going to have your car on the boat and you're driving to the post, which we did, we drove from Naples to Belgrade, and things to take in the car for the children.

Q: To get back to the Wriston program, did you feel a sense, any kind of separation between the group of Wristonees and the group of foreign service families?

WEISS: I felt some of that before we went, and your previous question reminded me of other ways that I and other new Wriston wives learned a little bit about the service, and that is, the Association of Foreign Service Women had monthly meetings and they were more or less social. They were luncheons. I remember at those, at one of them in particular, the new wives were asked to sit at tables where there would be at least one senior foreign service, maybe an ambassador's wife who was here either on leave or assigned, so that we could ask them questions. I found with one person I talked to a little bit of a condescending air.

Q: From a foreign service wife.

WEISS: Yes, but she'd been in a long time. She didn't know me.

Q: Why do you think that's the case?

WEISS: Well, I think it's a natural feeling that, you know, here comes a new crowd, and they're going to change everything. We're used to the way it used to be and we have our ways. I can't explain it otherwise. I think it's just a psychological, natural way to react.

Q: Were you treated differently at all as a Wristonee in terms of how you were compensated, how you get assigned for posts or anything?

WEISS: I don't know about the assignments. I couldn't answer that one. I felt that going to our first post as a wife of a counselor was coming in at a good level. It wasn't the highest; it wasn't the lowest. It was upper mid-level. I was a wife and mother. I wasn't brand new, young. But I was naive in other ways about the foreign service. I didn't find in Belgrade any

kind of condescension or difference. I think that was part of my naivet#. Maybe they felt it, but I didn't.

Mrs. Riddleberger was our ambassador's wife, and she was very welcoming and very warm. A very nice woman. There was no women's club. I liked all the wives I met, all the _____ wives. They were more or less at my level.

But we arrived at the time when the inspectors were there. We didn't have a house, and we didn't have an apartment yet. We were living in a hotel. The inspectors were in the same hotel. We'd just arrived that week. We'd see them at dinner in the hotel and so on. We were told that the morale amongst the women in the embassy, women who were already there, was very low. Other women had been reporting to the inspectors how bad things were. In Yugoslavia, it was a communist country. There was a language problem, a cultural problem, a political problem. All these isolating factors. At the top level I detected that they were all foreign-born wives. Mrs. Riddleberger was away from post a good bit of the time. She had to go to the dentist. She went back to Holland _____. The DCM's (Deputy Chief of Mission) wife was French. The agricultural attach#s wife was Italian. She would spend a lot of time in Bologna. The AID (Agency for International Development) director's wife lived in Paris and she almost never came to the post. So the top level of senior women who you would expect would kind of lead, help the new wives, or lead a group or something, were not there a good bit of the time, and therefore were not that aware that this was a strange place to come to for the first time.

So we found that at more our own level than at the senior level we got clues from women who were experienced. One woman — they had just come from a posting in Iran — and she complained about the housing. She said, “The housing here is terrible. It was all owned by the government, controlled” and so on. She said, “In Tehran we had our own swimming pool!” She was spoiled. So she contrasted Belgrade with her previous post. But she was an experienced wife.

Q: But for you it was different because it was your first post.

WEISS: I had nothing to compare it with, and I think that was an advantage. Nothing to compare it with. I'd been overseas during the war, but that was a very different situation. So I sort of took everything as it came along.

David, our four-year-old son, was too young for school, so there was a little nursery school run by, I think, a Yugoslav woman who spoke English. And other little American children attended, and some British. Susan was in third grade in the international school, which was very small. The school was housed in a villa that previously had been the residence of the AID director. The school had enlarged and needed a bigger place, so the community decided this is the best place. It had some nice grounds.

That was a little UN also because the children were from all the embassies, mostly. They had very little international business at the time, so they were mostly diplomats and not all English-speaking. But she loved it, and her teacher was an American and she was also the principal of the school. They did some lovely things there. It was kind of primitive in a way, but that was, I think, as much a part of her education as anything else.

Q: Your choice of the word "primitive" made me think of the fact that you were living in a communist country in 1957. Now, what was it really like? You already alluded to a few of those things: school for children and so on. I'm curious as an overall kind of thing.

WEISS: I didn't feel frightened by it. A few incidences later were a bit frightening, but they didn't touch me or us personally except that we knew we were bugged. We had to be very careful about what we said.

Q: Interesting. In your apartment.

WEISS: In our house. Well, in the apartment and then later. We got a house after about a year. We all knew that. And we all knew that our servants. . . . We had a live-in cook. The

cook commuted and we had a live-in maid, and we knew that they were obligated to report to the police whom we entertained, who our guests were. That didn't frighten me. We didn't do or say anything that was out of order I didn't feel.

When we were traveling — I took many trips with my husband when he went on official tours around the country — we knew that we were followed. That was routine. It affected us in a way that you had to be careful what you said and did all the time.

Q: And who you associated with.

WEISS: Well, I guess so. The Yugoslav officials with whom Len dealt were not allowed to entertain in their own homes. Never. There was one exception and that was an interesting one, a man who was a _____. But we were told by, I think, the DCM, _____ Markey, had been in another post and made friend with a Yugoslav official, and when they both were assigned to Belgrade, this official cut him off socially in the sense that he never reciprocated entertaining. It was all very official entertaining; it wasn't personal. You couldn't really get personal. You couldn't invite them to your tennis club or have them for a picnic or whatever.

It was very interesting because in that period of history Marshall Tito was a well-known world figure and he'd had a very interesting background. His wife had also been a partisan during the war. It was interesting to see the way they lived in the white palace where the king used to live, you know. They had island resorts and so on, where they lived. And being communists. I thought communist was everything for everybody, but it opened my eyes.

Q: Did you ever meet them?

WEISS: Yes, we met them at big functions. My husband had an opportunity to go to the island of Brioni when Tito was there. That was one of the summer places. He had places

almost everywhere. That was the occasion, I think, when the secretary of commerce visited with a small delegation from Washington along with him.

Q: I wanted to ask you earlier about whether you got any kind of training because you were assigned to a communist country for the first time, namely, Yugoslavia. Did you get any preparation?

WEISS: I don't recall that there was any preparation. Perhaps my husband did, officially. Usually the officers had an opportunity to have area study at the Institute. I don't recall that I had any except for reading the post report. At the post I took advantage of learning Serbo-Croatian at the embassy every morning. I was allowed to do that. Because I had to learn it. In some ways I needed it more than he did, because the people he dealt with in the foreign office and so on were better educated and they spoke German or French. Len studied Serbo-Croatian too, but he could also speak with them in other languages. So I learned it to speak with the cook, to go to the market with her, going downtown to do any errands. I had to have it. It helped a lot to read the signs. Of course, when we traveled, everything was in Cyrillic.

Q: The reason I mentioned any kind of orientation special to the communist countries — of course, now, we don't have to worry about it — but I understand that there is some kind of orientation for designated countries now for the foreign service officers and their families.

WEISS: I think that's a very good idea. I think the more you are prepared, the better, in any way, politically or socially. I'm reminded that there was an occasion when we went to Zagreb for the international trade fair, there was a big banquet that night, hosted, I believe, by the mayor of the city and very high officials, and I was included. Marshall Tito had come during the day. I think we had opened our first trade pavilion and the secretary of commerce had come to open that. Tito came for that, too. That evening, with this banquet, Tito was not at the banquet. I think I was sitting next to the mayor or some very high official. He was coming. Oh, you know, Tito, he's down there in town and he's dancing

and singing, and that will go on all night. That's the way we are. At the table, as always at anything official, there were a lot of glasses to drink.

Q: Lots of alcohol.

WEISS: Lots of toasts. On an occasion like this when Len was representing the embassy and the trade fair in his daily work, there were toasts to him and toasts to President Eisenhower and so on. Oh, I know. The host raised his glass to President Eisenhowerand we all drank a toast, and then he sat down and made a comment under his breath. He said, “You know, your President Eisenhower's in the hospital.”

Q: Who was that that made that comment?

WEISS: The host of the banquet. And he said, “And our president, who's exactly the same age as your president, is down in town dancing and drinking!” And I felt like saying, “But he doesn't have some of the same responsibilities.” And my husband doesn't drink, so he would have a hard time at these events because they would say, “Come on! Come on! Fill up your glass!” Try to urge him to drink.

Q: In that situation what would he do? Would he just put some water in his glass or something?

WEISS: If there was a water glass he'd use that.

Q: Speaking of representation, Mary Louise. . . .

WEISS: Let me interrupt and just say one little comment about being in a communist country. Yugoslavia was very unique because it was on the border between the eastern communist bloc and right on the edge of western Europe, and they looked in both directions. Politically, they were well known to be very tied to Moscow as a communist country, but they were unique in that they had their own. . . .

Q: The eastern bloc or did that exist at that point?

WEISS: The eastern bloc existed and they were part of it, but they were also more free than any others because Tito insisted that they would have their — I've forgotten what they call their unions — in the factories and so on. He stood up for that right. So Yugoslavia was unique and different than the others. It didn't simply follow the whole line. They also looked to the West and respected the West and copied some of the Western things.

Q: I was going to just ask you a little bit about the representational functions iYugoslavia. That was your first post and I got the impression that there were some difficulties regarding that.

WEISS: Well, there were, but all of these things are a challenge. I think most people like a challenge, to face a challenge and see what they can do about it. You learn as you go along.

Representation in Yugoslavia was difficult for the reason I mentioned a moment ago, that is the language problem. Another was if you invited eight people for dinner and, let's say, two or three couples were Yugoslav, they would accept. This is all done through the men's secretaries at the offices. So Len would come home and tell me so many had accepted. Well, the night of the dinner — this happened more than once — we'd go to the door to greet someone who was coming as our guests and whenever it was a Yugoslav it would be only the husband and not the wife. And I'd say, “Oh! I thought your wife would be coming” (because they'd accepted as a couple). He'd say, “Oh, no, she's babysitting,” or something like that. It happened so frequently that I was puzzled by it and discovered through others that the Yugoslav wives, many of them. . . . The government was formed mainly by men who had been partisans during the war. They were not well educated. They had not traveled and gone out. They were not sophisticated. And likewise with the wives. The wives didn't speak English or French often. And another thing I was told was that they just didn't have the clothing to wear. This wasn't that long after the war. Belgrade had been

badly damaged, and they just didn't have the resources. And I think they felt not only they didn't have the clothes, but they didn't feel they had the manners. They felt they'd be very uncomfortable coming into our home. It was sad, but that's the way it was.

I remember every time we would be giving a party, whether it was a dinner or luncheon or reception, we usually hired a local man to come and wait. Like a butler. There were several and we'd always see them at other people's houses. There were several of them. They understood English. They spoke French. My favorite was a man who had been a butler to a foreign service officer. He'd lived in Europe, so he was a little more sophisticated, and he set the table beautifully. He loved to set the table.

He'd go out in the garden and pick the flowers and do the flower arrangements. I had to do the name cards. And the tricky part, on my part, was to seat next to each other people who could converse with each other. Because if I knew that our DCM, ElimO'Shaughnessy, spoke English, French, German, almost anything, I would have to sit next to him, if there was a wife available, someone who could speak with him and not just someone who didn't speak anything but Serbian. You had to kind of match up interests and tastes as well if it was a very official dinner. It might be people coming from Washington. Sometimes it was all male, stag. And I'd usually have to arrange those, too.

I enjoyed it and I learned a lot. I think there was a lot of it that was, maybe, a little superfluous. It was the way it was done.

Q: Did they all seem to be formal or semi-formal, sit-down-dinner type of occasions?

WEISS: Yes, very much, except for receptions. I don't recall having as many luncheons there as we used to in other posts. Mostly dinners and receptions, cocktail parties. Our house was very small, but we had a large room that we would empty out for cocktail parties if we had a large crowd. I don't think there was any catering. We produced all the food, the cook, and she loved that. And they're very proud, the servants who work

for people like us. They're very proud of what they do and they want to have a good reputation. So they put on their best.

Q: When I hear about these situations in representation overseas, I'm always struck with the fact that a lot of people who help with the representation, the foreign nationals, are actually men. I often associate entertaining with women, but people who would help you overseas, butler and cook and so on, they're men. Does that strike you?

WEISS: Well, some cultures more so than others. In India all the house servants were men. We didn't have an ayah because our children were too old for that. The ones that did have them, they were usually women. They were always women. But mostly male servants. But our cook and our maid there [in Belgrade] were women. On the representation, this was a fairly formal post, although it was small. It was European.

Q: Belgrade?

WEISS: Belgrade. That's something that surprised me, being in a communist country. But it was rather formal in the European style.

When we went to Belgrade, as I said, we didn't have a house for a while. We were in an apartment there. A hotel, then an apartment, and then a house. We had to take all our furniture with us in those days, especially to that post, when one was not going into a DCM's house or an ambassador's house. So we had to take our furniture with us. Later on that changed. So we took our furniture with us. And we didn't have the kind of furniture from our small house for entertaining the way we were expected to. So we had to buy a lot of things that we needed once we got there. And much of this was done through catalogues. And that was fun too, in a way. And we traveled. When we went to Copenhagen we ordered silver from George Jensen. And I think we ordered our dining room table from Sweden, and that and some chairs came in a railroad car with a shipment that AID had made. AID was furnishing all of its houses and apartments. Ours was not. But they said, “We're ordering a trainload and there'll be some space. Do you want to order

some things? We can fit them in." So we bought our dining room table and chairs and some other things that we wanted. We had to get, as I said, the crystal and the silver. Our dishes we ordered by catalogue from Rosenthal in Germany. It was all kind of formal and the sort of thing that I wouldn't use back here. So they're stored away. I use them on very special occasions like weddings.

Q: That must have been a very expensive proposition.

WEISS: It was expensive, and I don't recall any allowance for it. There might have been. I just don't recall. I'm just not sure about that. Of course, a lot of it we're still using.

I don't recall much entertaining that wasn't official. I don't recall much that women did in the way of lunches. The women's club was started after the inspectors said the morale was so low that the ambassador's wife was more or less told she would have to do something about it. And so she got together a few wives and we decided to start an American Women's Club. That worked quite well. One of the first occasions was a luncheon at the home of the AID wife. She had a very large villa and a beautiful big dining room. And she said, "Every Wednesday there will be a luncheon here for women. Anybody." Secretaries, staff, wives, whoever. And that's the way it worked, and I remember some of the secretaries did come because they were left out of everything else. They weren't usually invited to formal dinners and so on. That was a starter.

Q: These secretaries were the Americans?

WEISS: Yes, and others. Not local employees. There were local employees in the embassy. They had to be very carefully screened. There were little tours to museums and so on. There wasn't really very much that we did in the beginning.

Q: How big would you say that the embassy was at the time?

WEISS: I think it was around a hundred. I think we thought a round figure like that, which included the AID mission, the military mission, and USIA. I think that was about it. I may be missing out on a few things.

Q: Majority was State Department, though.

WEISS: State. I think agriculture attach#, etc. We had a large AID mission for those times, for those years.

Q: Were they all together in the same mission, same building?

WEISS: Yes. The building had been an apartment house previously, and it was pockmarked by bullet holes from the war. Looked kind of depressing. But it worked. Back on the property they had a little shack or a little room that was a kind of club where you could go and have drinks or something. We had movies. Where did we show the movies? I don't remember. Oh, I know. We showed movies in our own homes. We were allowed to get movies through the military. The attach#s office had a list of movies, and if you wanted one to use for entertaining, you'd sign up for it. When the movie came in, you would go and get it for that evening, and then someone else would have a turn. They'd be there for about a week.

Same thing with milk. We had a small commissary, and a milk truck delivered milk, I think from Vienna or someplace in Austria, once a week. We all went to the commissary, which also reminds me that at the first meeting of the women's club group, I was sitting on a sofa with an attach#s wife on one side, a military attach#, and on the other side, I think an AID wife. And I said, “You know each other, don't you?” They'd been there quite a while longer. And they said, “We've never been introduced. We never see each other at formal functions.” But one of them said to the other, “I see you at the commissary every week, but I don't know who you are.” So the women's club, you see, brought all these women together.

The AID group was very large, and they had some perks that others didn't, such as the furnishings. But, on the other hand, they were not on the diplomatic list, and they felt left out. Because they were not on the dip list, they were not automatically on the invitation list. They really resented that. They were part of the Wriston group.

Q: Oh, they were.

WEISS: There was some resentment there. But, on the other hand, they had some things we didn't, and we had some things they didn't.

Q: So you ended up kind of sharing with each other.

WEISS: Yes, and I _____ being on the board of the school _____. I joined a little tennis club. It wasn't owned by the embassy. A very primitive _____. All it had was a couple of tennis courts. If you did those things, you'd meet there. We weren't bridge players. I think people who play bridge get to meet others that way.

Q: I'm not either.

WEISS: But there wasn't a great deal to do. We used to, in the winter, take the children to an outdoor skating rink downtown, in the city. They loved it. They were young. We bought skates. This was all very new and exciting. I think it had been some kind of stadium that was frozen over in the winter, and we went once or twice. But then we found that local children, Yugoslav children, weren't allowed to use it on, let's say, Sunday afternoon or whatever. They were throwing snowballs at them and kind of pestering them. Again, it's the haves and the have-nots.

Another thing that used to happen to our children, we lived in a residential area and had an iron fence around the house. We had a dog, a puppy dog, and the Yugoslav children who walked to school by the fence would tease our dog. One of them even threw an arrow toward the dog. They claimed the dog was [attacking them]. But then Len would come

home for lunch in the embassy car — he came home in the car every day for lunch — and one time when the driver started the car, there was a puncture in the front tire. One of these local children had put a nail in the tire.

Q: Oh, how awful!

WEISS: Susan used to go down the street where there was an area called the diplomatic colony. It's like a little residential area. Houses were set aside for diplomats. She'd go down there on her scooter. I don't think she had a bike. No, she had a bike. And one time when she was coming home — it was just a few blocks away — she had fallen and she was crying, and some kid had pushed her down, come by and pushed her for no reason. The streets were cobblestone, kind of rough. And she was kind of bruised, bleeding all over. Not all over. But that upset her, and again, you explain to your child. She went, “Why did they do this to me?” I said, “You had a bike and he didn't. You're the stranger. You're living in a house that maybe his father would like to live in.” That sort of thing.

Q: This sounds like this could be one aspect of communist country living. No?

WEISS: Well, some of these children might have been military. There was a military establishment of some kind down the street. Whether it was a school or training place I'm not sure, but a lot of Yugoslav military families lived there. We and a few other American embassy people were living on the street they were on. And I don't know whether it was military kids or not. I'm not saying it was. _____ to the foreigners, the strangers in that community.

Q: That made me think of the question of, after the first post, did you and your husband stop to kind of reflect on the decision that you had made?

WEISS: I don't remember that we stopped, literally, and did that. I think we just felt we were in and just went along with it. We came back here for three years, posted here, and so our children went back into the same schools. We came back into our house. We

wanted to keep the house. Some of our friends had sold their houses. I was glad we hung on to ours because we had something to come back to. The children could remember their rooms. They'd say, “Oh, I'm going to hang this up on the walls of the room.” People who had sold their houses didn't have that for their children. Our daughter went into Scouts and went back to the same school.

But they found that coming back — this is a different subject, to— when they come back, same neighborhood, same school, but the kids treat them differently.

Q: Interesting.

WEISS: Because they haven't had the continuity, and these kids, maybe, now are doing things or singing songs that our kids aren't familiar with. So it takes quite a while to catch up with them. On the other hand, the children here have nothing to relate to our experience abroad. They don't know what to ask you about. They don't stop to ask, “What was it like living in Belgrade?” They just know that you've been away for three years, and you don't know what we're doing.

Continuation of Interview - August 13, 1992 at Mary Louise's home.

Q: Mary Louise, we were talking about the Wriston program and also your life in a communist country, namely, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, as your first post; and we have talked about some of the aspects of representation in that country. At this point, it struck me that you seemed to have a pretty smooth transition from civil service into foreign service. Do you feel that's the case?

WEISS: Do you think that when we returned, did we feel. . . . ?

Q: The aspect of just moving after 10 years of civil service into foreign service. You had a lot of anxiety, obviously. But it seems like from what we have just talked about earlier you had a fairly smooth first post.

WEISS: I think so. I think it went smoothly. There were a lot of bumps in there, but there are everywhere, all the time, anyway. And I think we found. . . . The challenge is always good for everybody. I think we met it. The children seemed to have enjoyed their experience and were eager to come back home and renew this experience. That was a little hard at first.

Q: So the Wriston program created, in effect, created an opportunity for you that you found valuable.

WEISS: Oh, definitely, and I think we all, inside of each other, realized the advantages, the excitement, and interest, the advantages of being able to travel around Europe together as a family. Things like that, I think, made up for some of the rough spots and the disadvantages. Coming back home was a little hard for the children adjusting back into the community and school where they were looked on as different. But I think this is where the Association of American Foreign Service Women did so much for me. That is a binding group of women who all share similar experiences. They're not all exactly alike, of course. I have always been a member, and it's a place where you can meet people who have had similar experiences and you feel comfortable with them. I feel comfortable with you.

Q: Great!

WEISS: I look on it as a big family and we all share something that's very deep and exciting and different and challenging.

Q: On the opposite side of that, did you get any impression from the foreign service people who then came back through the Wriston program to serve in Washington, DC? Did you get any impressions about how they felt about that?

WEISS: About coming back?

Q: Yes.

WEISS: No, it was just another thing you accepted. Coming back for the first time was new and different. It was sort of like going to a post, but it was a familiar post and you fit back in. There are a lot of adjustments to make.

I guess I was thinking of the group who were particularly affected by the Wriston program, because at the beginning we mentioned the fact that the Wristonees were civil service being offered this opportunity to go overseas in the foreign service, whilesome of the foreign service officers can then come into Washington, DC, to take their posts. And I was wondering if there was any. . . .

Q: I was thinking more of the foreign service people when they come back.

WEISS: Right.

Q: To take up these positions that used to be civil service.

WEISS: I can't speak for them. I think they, too, knew they had to accept it. It was a change. It was a social change as well as other. I always would see those ladies at the women's association gatherings, and they didn't seem any different to me except that maybe they were more experienced in the foreign service. And so I looked on that as a great advantage that I could talk to them about or listen. I felt I was one of them, in a sense.

Q: Good.

WEISS: I didn't feel equal to them, but I felt, again, one big happy family. One big family. Very rich.

Q: Now, Mary Louise, I understand that you were pretty much a pioneer in the mental health program in the State Department. Could you tell me a little bit more about how that got started and how you got involved?

WEISS: Yes. I'm not sure that I can think of myself as a pioneer, but I was here at the time when things were developing and it was rather exciting in a way. President Nixon at the White House declared that every government agency was to establish a program to prevent drug abuse. Drug abuse prevention was the name of this program. There was quite a bit of money available for that and so every agency. . . . The secretary of state received a letter saying that he wanted to start a program, and the medical office brought in a psychiatrist, a man from the outside, from Wisconsin, Dr. Frank Johnson, who was an adolescent psychiatrist. He knew nothing. He'd never lived abroad. He knew nothing about foreign service except what he'd heard about it. He was a man of action. He started a mental health advisory committee, of which I was a member. I think there was an appeal through the department — yes, I remember now — through the department for anyone who was interested in this to come to monthly meetings. I was on the board of the AAFSW, and I think I was on the education committee at the time, and I was asked by our AAFSW president if I would be interested in serving on this committee as a representative of the foreign service women.

Q: And this would have been 19. . . .?

WEISS: About 1971. I was delighted. I wonder how she had asked me, but I thought she picked the right one because I was very interested. My role was to represent the women on this committee. It met monthly in the State Department. It was hosted pretty much by the medical bureau, and Dr. Johnson chaired it. There were representatives at those meetings of other bureaus in the State Department. I think there were some occasions when other agencies came into the meetings. The Army, other groups like that. I think the Army had already started something of its own.

Q: You mean, like other foreign affairs agencies.

WEISS: Yes. And, of course, within the State Department it included USIA (United States Information Agency), AID, and so on, and the overseas schools office, FSI (Foreign

Service Institute). I represented the women. I think AFSA (American Foreign Service Association). Eventually, the FLO (Family Liaison Office) office was represented. I think FLO had just opened.

The idea was to share ideas on how we could, what kind of programs and how to implement them. There were sessions when we were talking ideas around and to think about budgets and that sort of thing. The ideas were what excited me. I found in my files pages and pages of ideas I would send to Dr. Johnson about things I thought might be helpful. Others did the same.

The whole thrust was awareness. Make everybody, employees, families and so on, aware of the problem of drug abuse and how we could resolve it, how we could prevent it.

Q: Were there some specific incidents that raised this awareness? Were there some specific [issues]?

WEISS: I suppose there were through the drug administration, national drug administration. I wasn't too aware of those details myself.

Q: But not something specific that happened in the State Department with the foreign service?

WEISS: Not that I know of. There may have been, but not that I know of. There were records, of course, of drug problems and alcohol problems, that sort of thing. Because the thrust was awareness, it was a matter of educating people, talking about it, getting the word around, involving as many people as possible of all ages. One of the things I admired about Dr. Johnson was he said, “If it's a drug abuse problem amongst the teenagers, then they must be involved. We want them with us.” So they were encouraged to come into their own. . . . I think they had their own meetings. They sent out flyers to the personnel in the department. Any teenage dependents get together in the summer when they were out of school and talk about their [concerns]. What were they aware of that was going

on at the post or here that were hurting their friends or in their families? Eventually, a youth development team was developed. I never liked that title, but I think the kids gave themselves that name.

The youth development team was focused on the teenagers. Because I was representing the women, I felt that I had to focus on more than just problems with children, but were there problems in families. Was it alcohol? What would drive people to take drugs, or drive them to become alcoholic? There must be a problem that makes them do that. What are those problems? They have the problems. Because we had these meetings monthly and were sharing all of this, things would come out. The wives would say, :Well, we need more training. The men can get language training at FSI and we can't. If we are entitled to any orientation, we can't come because we have little children at home and we can't afford to get a babysitter." So we had to work out those kinds of things. There was more training available, and allowances.

Q: And that kind of got also out from the mental health awareness?

WEISS: All of these things were, I think, involved with the mental health. It wasn't just drug abuse prevention. It was mental health. It was morale. All of these things together. They're all tied together. If there's a problem in a family because a child is dyslexic, then they can't take the child to a post because the child can't be educated. And what do we do about that family, because there were more than one child with that problem? Someone mentioned that. Then you get the department aware and you get more allowances to take care of special problems like that.

The foreign-born spouses, I think, had a morale problem. They felt a little isolated in some ways. There might be a language problem, and all of that. So they stood back a bit. That was one of the things I focused on later and eventually they established their own foreign-born spouse association.

Q: Network.

WEISS: Network. Ideas such as newsletters, magazines at the post, are a great help as a place where articles can be written about problems like this. An outlet for people to get together and express themselves. The teenagers. At the school in India, the international school, I believe the American Women's Club sponsored a writing contest to allow the teenagers, the students, to become more involved in the community, being able to express themselves. Writing poetry and essays and other things. They weren't just writing about travel and about their experiences. They were writing about all kinds of things that were happening to them. All this is mental health. Vague, in some ways, but if people can express themselves and feel it's all right to talk about a drug problem or a friend who has a drug problem, then you're going down the right track.

Q: Speaking of writing about mental health, you are a writer and you have produced a number of articles about mental health, and that obviously had a lot of impact on the community in general?

WEISS: Possibly. I wrote an article after our experience in India when our daughter came back to college alone and we were still out there. She was young. She was 16. She'd gone through school there in three years rather than four. I felt she was a bit young to be coming back alone and going into college. I wish she could have stayed another year, but my husband wanted her to keep her educational continuity. But nevertheless, she came back and it was a very difficult year. I wrote an article. I was asked, I believe, to write an article — also I had written a letter — about her transition and the problems she had coming back from India while the family was still out there, because she was traveling alone for the first time across the world. We told her how to go through an airport and handle her own luggage, her own checking account, all of that. I don't think we'd really thought that much about it beforehand. She'd traveled with us and she knew what to do on her own. She did come back with a girlfriend and stopped in Europe as many of the children did who left school out there. But it was very traumatic in many ways, her transition. So I wrote

about what families could do in advance to help pave the way, make children a little more aware. You know, you're going to have to be careful of this and that when you're traveling; and when you get to school alone, what to expect. It may be a while before your luggage comes, or whatever. How much is considered an adequate amount in college. In New York City.

Q: Yes, yes, all those little details. Yes.

WEISS: So that was an article I wrote. And then I wrote some. . . . I did a lot of reporting of this mental health committee, of columns in the AAFSW newsletter, about the development of these programs. Also we had articles in the AID news. I've forgotten what they call their newspaper. And USIA and the Foreign Service Journal.

Q: Maybe you can tell some of those major events in the development of the mental program?

WEISS: I mentioned the youth development team. There was a team — I think it was in 1972 or three — that consisted of about four teenagers, foreign service teenagers. They went with Dr. Johnson and, I believe, a medical administrative officer, to the Far East where most of the problems were, problems with drug abuse, especially.

Q: In the Far East.

WEISS: Yes. They went to Vientiane, Bangkok. The youth, the young people in that group, felt their role was to work with the students in the schools.

Q: In the international schools.

WEISS: In these schools, whatever post they were visiting. In Bangkok I think there was more than one school where Americans went. So they'd fan out into the schools and talk to the students in assemblies and in classes and in other ways. I think they met for bull sessions in the evenings and social occasions, trying to talk about all of this. “What are

the problems here? What do you think we should do about it? What can you do about it? What are you willing to do to help here at the post?" Then getting the youth and the adults together.

They came back and wrote a report. Meanwhile, those of us back here were still carrying on with these meetings. The following year Dr. Johnson asked me if I would go with them, with the youth development team, also to the Far East, again, to be another adult along with him. And there were two young people, a young man and a young woman who was not foreign service; but the young man was. That was the way they were recruited. Anyone could come who was interested and had certain qualifications. But, again, my role was to deal with whatever women's issues were a problem at the post. So I talked with every personnel director. They all happened to be women, single women, in every post, and asked those people, the personnel people in the embassies, about the possibilities for employment of wives who had adequate training or could take jobs. In many posts there were problems with work permits. Some governments just won't allow. That may have changed now. I also talked with as many wives as I could. I addressed the women's groups.

In Bangkok we had a big regional conference, so all the people interested from the whole region, from Djakarta, Manila, Vientiane, New Delhi, came to Bangkok where we had a regional medical officer. We had a big conference. There were representatives of the schools, community leaders who might be church representatives, student leaders, women's leaders, and that sort of thing. Anyone dealing with American children and families. I met a woman who was a school counselor in Vientiane. She told me — I think in our hotel room one evening; it was only an aside, but it really opened my eyes — she said that in Vientiane they had a small American school, international school. Many of the children whom she was counseling were college entrance. They were all American high school and soon they were going to go on to college. She was the counselor. And many of these young American students had mothers who were Vietnamese or Laotians, Thai. They were Asian mothers, who had married American, either embassy personnel or some

of them had married flyers. I think we had a secret airline, you know, doing all kinds of things. And these women, many of them, couldn't speak English, and so in the home they were speaking their own language. This was hard for the children to understand quite who they were. They thought they had problems. Some of those mothers, I learned from this woman, were using drugs as people in that part of world do socially. It's more of a cultural thing. But it was a problem for the kids. Drugs are so available, were so available, and so cheap. A lot of the kids were taking drugs. They didn't know what they were doing. Ninety percent pure heroin. Maybe they tried marijuana at home. They'd go out there and they'd get heroin.

So she was having problems with these high school students, who, some of them, had never been to America. They were born overseas.

Q: And mixed parents.

WEISS: And mixed. So she came up with the brilliant idea of rather than having the students say, “Oh, I want to go to this university or that one, or that college,” she suggested that this small group, maybe six of them, all apply to the same small college so they could be together. I thought that was very smart, because they would at least have each other in their first year. Whether they went on and did other things or not, I don'know, or spread out. That was one way she dealt with it, but it made me aware that it isn't just fathers who have several drinks at night, who may be alcoholics, but many of the mothers and wives also had some of these problems.

So, representing women, I thought, this is something I had to bring to the attention of Dr. Johnson. And I said, the foreign-born spouses — I knew there were a lot of them here and always have been many, a high percentage in the foreign service. . . . Not that they have a problem, but for their own morale, their mental health, or whatever, give them some identity. So they eventually founded their own association and they had a newsletter. I can't find one. I've got one somewhere here I'll give you.

Q: And you're going to revive that, I understand.

WEISS: Yes, I just started, and we will have our first meeting on August 25th. So I sent out some letters and sheets to indicate topics and to get some sense of what people would like to address during meetings, and I spoke to almos20 of them who had been involved in previous groups.

So if people can meet with others who they feel comfortable with, they can talk about things that bother them, or even things that may not be serious problems, maybe just the language difficulty. But if they can meet with others and have a good time, it helps their mental health.

Q: So this is all part of the agenda of the mental health program.

WEISS: Yes, and the drug abuse prevention was maybe a core. When we visited embassies, Dr. Johnson addressed the ambassador's. . . . What do you call it? The ambassador has a meeting of all the staff. The country team. I remember in India he did that and made them aware that alcohol abuse is a drug abuse. Think of it as a drug. People take advantage of the marine barracks nearby, the marine house where every Friday evening people go from work. They have their drink and then go home. Well, that was a social occasion. But some people, it got to be a problem. Some people are more prone to alcohol as a problem rather than just social.

Q: Is that a problem, too, during the representational functions sometimes? Alcohol?

WEISS: Well, that's been mentioned, that there's too much of it. It's too much available. You get liquor through the embassy commissary. You get it cheaper than you would otherwise. But you have to use it for entertaining, or you think you have to except in Muslim countries where they don't drink. But if you don't serve it, they expect it. We always downplayed that because we're not drinkers, but we did offer it along with juice and other things. It has been talked of as something that is so available that it can lead

to abuse because it's there and it's easy and it's cheaper. People may take to drink for more than just social reasons because they're away from home and they feel disoriented or separated from children or whatever it is, you know.

Q: Was there any emphasis on all the types of mental health problems, drug-related?

WEISS: Oh, definitely. It covered the waterfront, as we say. It covered anything people looked at as a problem, as stress, whether it was not having your child with you, a child away from home at school, or a medical problem where you have to be evacuated. That happened to me in Yugoslavia. I had to be evacuated out medically. And then the children learn about it. It affects the children. In some isolated or underdeveloped posts where there aren't fine hospitals or facilities you have to be evacuated out. It may just be nearby, Calcutta or Bangkok or further. It may be back home. Medical problems, physical problems, can be a mental problem. They affect the whole family. And financial problems come into it too if you're worried about that.

The wives were organized, or organizing, as in the case of the foreign-born wives. The youth organized their own association. I want here to give credit to Lee Dane. She's a Ph.D. in psychology now, and she was on that original mental health committee. She'd come back from Madras, where she'd done some work, and she had teenagers, and as the ideas developed, she suggested a weekend retreat at her home out in Great Falls, Virginia, which is along the Potomac. I don't know how many there were, but quite a number of high-school-age foreign service teenagers went out. I think Dr. Johnson was there also. They had their canoeing and their picnics and so on, but they had talk sessions where they just talked about the foreign service life. There were several of those retreats later and I think maybe they still have some. Eventually they had their own newsletter. And they called themselves “Around the world in a lifetime.”

Q: Oh, yes! AWAL.

WEISS: They've changed the name now. I'm pretty sure that recently there is a grant from the Tufts Foundation and AAFSW that's helped finance some of their projects.

Q: This brought to mind a question of whether you. . . . It sounds like there were parallel programs and attention paid to the dependent teenagers, children, and so on, as well as the adults, the employees and the spouses. Mary Louise, do you feel that there are any differences between problems that children face and adults face in the foreign service?

WEISS: You mean little children as against older children? Or children in general?

Q: Children who are of different ages, as opposed to the adult group, adult and non-adults, I guess.

WEISS: Oh, definitely. At post, especially. At home they can do things with neighbors and the Scouts and so on. In some posts there were more facilities than in others for the children when they're out of school. There are problems which include children; some that don't. I remember in New Delhi in part of the embassy complex there is a swimming pool and a snack bar. There was a hired — well, maybe more than one — a local lifeguard for the pool. And when I heard that teenagers, either there already in the high school or college-age student dependents coming to visit their family in the summer, wanted to be employed, wanted summer jobs, and there were no summer jobs available. What could they do? Couldn't they work at the snack bar? Couldn't they be lifeguards? I helped to look into that because our son was interested although he was a little bit young for that, but he was interested. There was some regulation that a local employee was a lifeguard. They were frustrated because they wanted not only to have something useful to be doing. My point was that they needed work experience, and I wrote about that, too, that we should find employment overseas for our older students. They get work experience that they need, even if it's volunteer work. Because when they come home and they're in college or high school, they want a summer job like every other teenager. And if they don't have any

experience, they have to start from the bottom. And if they have some experience, that's a little help.

Q: Yes, good point.

WEISS: Employment for students abroad was one thing. Employment for wives is quite another, wives who were social workers or lawyers or artists or whatever. That's something else.

Q: So they do face different sorts of problems.

WEISS: They do, and the students know that they're going eventually to be leaving their parents and going back to school and will be on their own. And I think they deserve to have what they feel they need. The smaller children, I think, don't have quite these same needs when they're quite young. Parents take them to play with their friends, and they can go to the pool or have a little pool. They play in the park nearby after school. Whatever, it's much easier with the young ones.

Some of the problems come with ayahs, or nursemaids, especially in some cultures where there's a different way of bringing up little children. They're either too overbearing or too hovering over them. Preventing them from walking when they might want to start. Things like that.

Dr. Sidney Werkman is a psychiatrist who wrote a book about raising children overseas. There have been a few books written. But he came to some of these meetings from the University of Colorado, and became so interested. I think he had had a practice here in Washington.

Q: Some of the meetings that you were running.

WEISS: The mental health advisory meetings. He became so interested in the special problems of raising families overseas that he wrote a book. But before he wrote the book,

he came to Washington and interviewed any foreign service families, individuals, mothers or children or whoever, who were interested in giving him some input. I went to some of those, and I think there was an open meeting, too, or individual meetings with him where you could just spill out whatever you wanted to. I can't say that that came as a result of this awareness program aimed at drug abuse, but it started as a whole mental health development in the foreign service.

Another thing, speaking of psychiatrists, is that Dr. Johnson was plugging for the foreign service to have a psychiatrist at each and every regional office.

Q: I was just going to ask you that.

WEISS: There were, eventually, in — I've forgotten how many regions there are. . . . At the same time I was noticing that many of the foreign service women who were coming back from overseas — as I was talking to them at a meeting — and they were expressing some interest in health generally. . . . I said, “Well, come to one of these meetings.” I discovered that several of them were coming back and getting degrees in social work. More than one. It was very interesting.

Q: This was when?

WEISS: In the early '70s. And they eventually, again through sharing all these ideas, decided to organize themselves; and they set up a foreign service social worker group. Dr. Johnson also suggested to the department that not only psychiatrists at post would be necessary, but to have a social worker, because you could employ a wife at the post who was a social worker to work with the doctor, embassy doctor. I think that had a meager beginning. I don't know that it every got anywhere.

Another result of all this was the formation in the State Department, on the same floor where the medical office is, State Department Employee Services. That consists of social workers.

Another thing that developed was the Foreign Service Educational and Counseling Center. Clark Slade for 15 or so years had been a counselor on education, mostly selecting schools. He had an office across the street in the AFSA building. Anyone who wanted advice on where to place a boarding student, he was there to help. But he did more than school counseling, and he felt it should be more than just an educational center. It should be also counseling for mental health. So he started it. He asked me to help design this. And this is the Educational and Counseling Center. Eventually, he himself was brought into the medical office, employed there; and this changed when the FLO developed and took over some of these things, these same counseling services. They had an education person in FLO. So it kind of split away. But at its time it served a purpose and I was on the board of that.

Q: I thought _____ essentially a counseling service at FSI currently.

WEISS: _____. Not just for employment?

Q: No, no. I think it's for. . . .

WEISS: I'm not current on all that.

Q: Yes, I do not remember the name of it.

WEISS: At the briefing center?

Q: No, it's a separate office in, I believe it's in FSI, probably because of the fact that it's so available to people who are there usually when they are back home for training and so on. I remember seeing some pamphlets about that. I can't tell you the name.

WEISS: I'd be interested to know more about it. That was another thing. Psychiatric treatment was more available in the department — at post, too — but in the department. They enlarged the staff in the med.

Q: Wasn't there some special program also for children with psychiatric problems? I was under the impression they did something specific to children.

WEISS: I'm not sure.

Q: When you were involved, then. I thought that they would evaluate children for school, maybe?

WEISS: Well, that may have been there. Another thing that happened. Before some of these things developed there was a questionnaire that was sent out to posts and to every foreign service family here, a questionnaire asking what specific issues anybody, an y foreign person would like to have dealt with, that didn't have a resource. The children had an input in that. They were asked to submit any questions they would like answered, and the older students and families. I think all the children who were her e were interviewed for their ideas, who were not necessarily involved in the program.

Awareness went out. It came back. And then it went out again in the form of ideas and programs.

Q: And then programs, specific programs, such as the psychiatrist, regional psychiatrist and the social workers and so on.

WEISS: Meanwhile, over at FSI there was more training for women. The briefing center started the FLO office, opened the FLO office. It's been a marvelous resource for families. That really developed and has enlarged tremendously.

Continuation of Interview - August 21st, 1992.

Q: Okay, Mary Louise, when you were talking about mental health at the end of our interview. . . . I'd like to ask you if there is anything you'd like to add regarding the mental health program, or anybody you're like to mention.

WEISS: I was thinking that it would be important to mention that during that period, the early period of the programs in the State Department, when Dr. Johnson was heading the mental health advisory committee in the State Department, the mental health committee, anyone who was interested was welcome to come into it. As it built up awareness and interest, the department was offering, well, I suppose you could call them scholarships for training at the National Institute of Drug Abuse. I went with some of the young people, some of the teenagers, to a training course here in what was in Rosslyn. I can't remember how long it was, but it was several days; and that was very exciting and interesting working with the young people.

Q: So these are scholarships for teenagers.

WEISS: Well, for me, too. It was covering the costs of the training. Other people who were in those courses were people who were working in communities and cities. We happened to be foreign service, but we, along with others, were getting the same kind oftraining in how, once you leave this workshop, to go out into your community — our community would be the State Department and foreign service posts — and set up programs to alleviate the problems and build up awareness. And that, I found very stimulating and rewarding and educational.

There was another brief one. These are all overnight stays. Another one I attended was here in Washington. My roommate was Marina _____. I hadn't met her before, but she was a very good woman who went out into her community here and did things with the schools. Clark Slade came up with the suggestion during this period for a training course for foreign service women, wives, mothers, who would be interested in kind of non-professiona— I'm not sure of the word I want — social worker training. He was, besides being the educational counselor for the State Department foreign service, also worked out at the Episcopal school for children in Northwest Washington, DC. Another wife, who was on this committee, Connie Hill, and I did take that course. I think it was, maybe, six or nine months long, under his supervision. We were actually assigned to cases. The other

woman, Connie, had done all of her social work training years and years ago, and she left college and then went into her master's. I had not had that, so there was a long gap in her training and I had had none; but I had this interest. Clark Slade's idea was that by taking a training course under his supervision, we would come out with some kind of a certificate, or at least an experience, a work experience, that would help if we wanted to go on with it. And I thought that was a very good idea.

And I did mention the foreign service women's social workers who organized with the idea that when they went to posts they could use their professional training at the post, or here in Washington. That was quite successful. I'm not sure if it's still in existence. I hope it is.

Q: So there were quite a number of people who were involved with the mental health program at various stages.

WEISS: I would say there was just the right number. It wasn't an immense group. It was a group big enough to handle. As with any organization or volunteer kind of thing, only those who were truly, deeply interested would come into it, and dedicate themselves as long as they're interested. That's the way it was. These were years that we were between posts, and I felt I was mature enough that I knew what I wanted to do or develop, not having had a career in all of our foreign service life. And I was here and my children were grown and I had the time and I was deeply interested in it. There were other women like myself or others who came back who were on this committee or got into this work, who, at the same time or later on, went on to get degrees of one kind or another in this kind of career.

Q: Great! So this was a lot of personal growth, as well as contribution to the community.

WEISS: Oh, definitely! Definitely so.

Q: Great. Mary Louise, you also mentioned things about international schools, the different situations at different posts. Maybe you can address that a little bit?

WEISS: Yes, I think every post has a different school situation. Our first one was in Belgrade. Our daughter was then eight and had gone into third grade. Our son attended a nursery school during that period. The small international school there, to me, was a mini UN. It was almost ideal. It was just the right size. It was housed in a former villa that had belonged to, was used by the AID director. It was a pleasant situation and a home atmosphere, but it was a school. And it was truly international. All the diplomatic children whose parents were there and wanted their children at the post attended. Asia, Africa, Britain, and France. Many of the children didn't know English, couldn't understand English, so there was coaching, tutoring, I believe, either before school in the morning or after. They had to attend classes that were taught in English. This was what they couldn't understand at first. So they would get the coaching afterwards, and the children kept up very quickly.

In the fall when there is United Nations Day, we celebrated, and the children were asked to wear their national costumes in a little parade. Our daughter came home and said, “What is our national costume?” I didn't know what to say! I don't recall what she wore. I went over and took pictures, as many of the parents did. The son of the Ethiopian ambassador was there with a shield and a monkey-fur cape, which was very, very dramatic. The little British boy, I think, was wearing kilts. And so on. A Burmese girl, who was a friend of my daughter's, wore a Burmese outfit. That was not unexciting to me. I'm sure it was to the children. They were encouraged to think internationally. I believe during that UN week the children were asked to bring to school things from their own countries, dolls or toys or books that they could display so that everyone could share within the school community. Our daughter thought this was wonderful.

I remember two little boys in her class were from Uruguay. One of them was dressed as a cowboy. I think the other was a pirate, which puzzled me, but this was their idea. They had to dress in a costume. Whether their parents didn't have one for them and they just thought, “Well, let's wear something that's a costume.”

Q: They came up with something.

WEISS: Yes, and that was the whole idea, to get the children into thinking about the others and of themselves as one big family. That was a wonderful experience for them.

Q: Is that always easy, though? Do you always find good international schools in all the posts you served?

WEISS: I don't think so. We had fewer posts than many people. And, of course, it varies. That was a communist country, and that was an international school that was run by — as any private school here would be — by the parents of the children. There was a school board. I was on the school board. The principal was an American woman, who had been widowed and had lost her, not only her husband and her child in an automobile accident. And I remember Susan came home. She also taught third grade. Susan came home that first week and said that Miss Williams told us that she had lost her only child in an automobile accident, but she was so happy that she now had this family of however many children there were in the third grade. So she felt motherly toward all those children. It was reflected back by them. They looked on her differently than just a teacher. It was a marvelous situation.

I think it depends on the leadership. A lot of these things do, and this woman was good. The community was kind of isolated because we were in a communist country, and not everyone wanted to send their children abroad to school, especially at the younger ages. So we just put every effort into making this school a good one, and it was very good.

I think what they lacked in that school that they might have gotten here they made up for in other ways. And that's true of all the schools abroad. When Susan came back here to enter [high school], I believe it was, she had not had much American history, particularly of Virginia, which was required in the Virginia schools. So she realized that was something she hadn't had abroad and it didn't matter that much abroad; but she got it here, and took

a special interest in it. There are courses in many schools that they don't get abroad, but they get other things at other kinds of schools and they make up for it. When we lived in Bonn, our daughter, Susan, was in college and David was going to Bonn with us to enter the ninth grade for a half year. He only had half of the year here and we went out in December, and he had had, in the ninth grade here in Arlington, what they were going to be teaching in the second semester in Bonn, which was a defense department school. So the school was confused about that. They had David sitting in the hall in a chair while the class was learning things he had already learned for that next semester. I'm sure that hurt him. I'm sure in other ways it might have strengthened him, but it was kind of sad in a way. But you learn by these things.

Here, he had just begun to learn driving. Did I mention this in the interview?

Q: Yes, you did.

WEISS: So that was another little aspect. The school in India was a truly international school. Indians, as well as all other nationalities who were represented in India, were eligible to attend.

Q: These were not just diplomat's, children of diplomats.

WEISS: No, not at all. Business. And in India there were in India. You know, in Yugoslavia, Yugoslav children were never at the school, and there would have been a language problem.

Q: Was it run differently in India?

WEISS: In India? Well, this was a higher level school. At least, our children were at mid- and high school levels. So I saw it from a different level. It was run by the board. Again, I was on the school board. Later, eventually, I believe it was after we left, and for some political reason — I think our countries were having some problems — it became the

American Embassy School. I believe, but I'm not sure of this, that Indians and possibly some other nationalities were not allowed to attend. I'm not sure, or whether it was that the tuition was different. I shouldn't go into that because I don't know. But it became the American Embassy School, whereas before, it was the American International School; and the teachers were from the U.S. and Britain and other places. It was as international as they could make it. Of course, some countries can't provide teachers, or teachers can't apply from some places. They don't qualify or whatever, but it was as international as they could make it. And the experiences were marvelous.

But when we arrived in New Delhi, the opening day of school was to be an event out on the lawn under what they call a 'shamiana,' like a tent; and parents were invited to come if they wanted to. I did, and I'm so happy I did. Indira Gandhi was then the daughter of Prime Minister Nehru. She also, I believe, held a post; she was minister for education. So she was particularly interested. And she was asked to speak. It was a small gathering of students and parents. The principal, maybe the student leader, presented her with a marigold wreath around her neck, which is typical. Then she spoke to the children, and she said, “I was once one of you. I went to school in Switzerland when I was” (whatever age she was). She said, “I remember being far away from home, far from my parents. I wrote letters to them. They wrote letters to me. And I knew what it was like to be away from home, away from my family in a strange country.” And so she immediately related to them and they to her. They were sitting on the edge of their seats.

Q: How old was she?

WEISS: She was a mother. In fact, her two sons went to school, went to the international school. Our daughter went to parties where her sons were, and they did things together with a group.

Another wonderful thing about that school that impressed me, the kind of atmosphere in a school like that, in a community where you're far from home in a different culture, Susan

was entering tenth grade, ninth. She went through in three years. The first day she arrived she was invited by a senior in the high school, years older than she was, to come to a party that he was giving. She was so thrilled! She came home and told me about it. Back home, here, you more or less socialized with your peer group and your class and your homeroom and your neighborhood. He was a senior. He was older and very handsome. The school was like that. The whole hundred students, or hundred Americans, or whatever the numbers were, thought of themselves as a unit, not as this class and that class, eighth grade, tenth grade, seniors. They, at least this is the impression I had, it was more or less for all Americans. We're all here and we're all neighbors. Our parents work in the embassy, the same embassy. Our parents know each other, which isn't always the case here. So there were these marvelous opportunities.

I remember when we came back, talking to Clark Slade about what I think of as the circles of our community life in a place like New Delhi, which is a very, was, at that time, a very large post. All of the American children, more or less, went to the same school. Some went to boarding schools up in the mountains. All the parents, husbands, were employed at the American embassy. We all used the same doctor at the embassy, and the nurse. We all did our shopping at the American embassy commissary. There was a community church where most of us went, attended. There was a Catholic and so on, but more or less. And we all went to the movies together. So we had more than one circle. We all did and lived in the same area, did the same things together.

You come home and your neighborhood is one of your circles. Or you have friends and neighbors. Your parents work in different places. My husband was at the State Department. My neighbor's husband worked in the Defense Department, and so on. They weren't the same. More or less, the children went to the same schools, but we'd do our shopping in different places. We went to different doctors. We went to different churches. But when you live abroad in a post, and especially in a small post, it's a small circle of

activities and socializing, pretty generally — of course, there are exceptions — that I think draw people together. It's quite unique and very rewarding.

Q: Mary Louise, in previous conversations I have noticed that you seemed to be very fond of India. You started to talk about the schools there. Can you tell me a little bit more about India and about what were the attractions for you and your family, the various things.

WEISS: There are so many I wouldn't know where to start. India was a huge country. It's as large as all of Europe. Geographically, it has the highest mountains in the world and down to the far south. Many, many different languages, different ethnic backgrounds. So there's that variety that's almost endless. When I think of India, I think of brilliant colors, not only the bright sun, but the women wore brilliant saris of bright red with gold trim and so on. Gardens in the winter were very colorful.

Q: That was what it was like when you were there?

WEISS: Yes. And music. Everything was very different to us, the music, the languages, the landscape. Everything was very, very different from anything we had experienced before within Europe, but we had not been in that part of the world. It's very different.

I was very enthusiastic about being there and learning as much about it as I could.

Q: Did you learn the language before you went?

WEISS: I didn't have an opportunity before I went, but I studied Hindi there. One of the marvelous things about being posted there was the orientation we had when we arrived. There was money available at the embassy, money [counterpart funds] that was earned by our food and other aid to India. The Indians repaid us in an amount of money that could be spent only in India. A lump of it was used for an orientation course for newcomers. Ambassador Bowles insisted that every employee in the embassy not come to his office until he had taken this course. People and families arrive in the summer, so we attended

in the summer. Children above age 16, or something like that, were invited to attend. It was a two-week training course at the University of New Delhi, which is in Old Delhi. We were picked up every morning by an embassy van, which would come to the neighborhood where the Americans lived. I jumped into the van, and we took our lunch with us. It would go on to pick up another wife and others and on to other places where American lived. Not just Americans. There were some Canadian nurses. I think anyone who was interested, who fit certain requirements, could attend.

Then there was a long drive around the city, out to the university. This was at a time when there had been a lot of flooding. The rivers had flooded. So, as we drove around Ring Road, similar to our Beltway, but not quite the same, we could see the flooding from the river covering acres and acres of ground, which forced a lot of people to move out of their homes and shanties on to the roads. Many of them were living in big, round sections of sewer pipe that had not been laid. There were just living there. So we could see that, and that was an eye opener.

Q: All the poverty.

WEISS: Yes. And then out through the Old City. We had lectures by people from the government. We were told about the geography of India, which is vast. We would be given a lecture by the agricultural minister about that.

Oh, I should go back, because I think the first day we were given a session at the embassy about the roles of our husbands or families in the embassy itself. Why were they there? They were there because we had a big AID mission, Peace Corps. Rockefeller Foundation and Ford were there. All of these things were explained to us so that we realized what the roles of the Americans were, not just our husbands, but others.

Q: So, what is America doing in India.

WEISS: Yes, and then we learned from the government and other officials what India was like, what India had to offer. History. Lectures like this in the morning, and then we'd break for lunch; and then in the afternoon there were optional tours to some of the historical sights or museums. Things of that kind.

One of the lectures I remember was by an American missionary woman who had written a book called, Behind Mud Walls. I had read the book. I think she had lived in India as a missionary wife for something like 40 years, in a village. I expected to see a woman that looked very different. She came out dressed in a linen dress, with a scalloped linen collar and cuffs. She looked very dainty. A beautiful surprise. She told us about their work in the village and what life in the village was like.

So we learned a great deal in our first two weeks through this orientation course. It was superior.

Q: How long did this orientation last?

WEISS: I think it was two weeks.

Q: Two weeks, yes. Seems like a very good introduction.

WEISS: Oh, it was excellent. You couldn't duplicate it back here at all. You could duplicate some of it, perhaps, but not in the same way. These trips in the afternoons, the visits to historical sights or a village, each one led by an Indian to explain it to us, gave us an early experience in the kind of country we were living in.

Q: Yes. You mentioned that Indira Gandhi spoke at the international school. Were there other major events that happened during your posting in India?

WEISS: Oh, yes. We arrived in the summer, and in the fall — was it November? — President Kennedy was shot, was assassinated. That was a very dramatic event in India.

Ambassador Bowles had been recalled to Washington before that had happened, so he wasn't there. Mrs. Bowles asked any of the wives who could to come and help serve, volunteer to come and help serve during the day, to stay at the official residence to help her when Indians and diplomats would be coming to pay their respects. There's always a book that's signed [located] outside the door with an American marine guard in uniform and the flag, and then the book. People would come up to that and sign and usually come in and speak to her and make some comments. So I helped with that. I believe there was a ceremony at the end, on the front steps. The Indians just poured out in droves to respond to this. It was just absolutely amazing.

I can't remember whether it was the following spring, Prime Minister Nehru died, and that was another very dramatic event in the history of India and the world. Everything stopped. I believe the embassy was closed. At least, people were encouraged to attend the service, which was held at the ghat, the burning ghat on the edge of the river. There was a tremendous parade, not parade, but cortege. Nehru's body was raised on some kind of a platform on wheels. I remember it looking strange because this was, I think, in May or June when it's the absolutely hottest weather of the year in India. The reason it looked so distorted was that they had packs of ice over the body, covered with some kind of a shroud; and on top of that it was cluttered with marigolds and flowers.

Q: And you have pictures of that?

WEISS: I think so. Other events that were annual, but very exciting and interesting — you learned a lot — were the annual national day parades, their national day parades, in January of every year, when every state in India was represented with dancers, or whatever. Elephants all decked out in their jewels and the maharajahs under the umbrellas, and, of course, military units, dancers and so on. This was quite a long parade. It went on for hours. Receptions. In the evening, there was what was called “the beating retreat.” Rashtrapati Bhavan, the prime minister's residence, was lit all around the edges. It

was lighted in the sunset. There was a review of troops and, I think, a bugler or some kind of musician standing silhouetted against the sunset. That was another dramatic thing.

There was a war between Pakistan and India — I think that was 1965, but I'm not sure of the date — when we had to observe a curfew. We even had to cover windows with black. Had to stay indoors. I remember worrying that my family at home were more concerned about us than we were ourselves. But there were tanks coming from Pakistan across the desert in India, Pakistan tanks that we had supplied to Pakistan, and planes in the sky that we had provided and sold to the Indians. So we provided the war materiel on both sides, and I thought this was rather strange.

One of our wonderful early experiences with the children was spending a summer on Lake Dal in Kashmir. Many of the foreigners did that. There were houseboats on the lake that had been built by the British. In so many ways, the British were not allowed to buy property, I believe, so they built the houseboats and used those. During the hot weather they all went up.

Q: That must have been wonderful.

WEISS: That led to opportunities to trek up into the mountains. Kashmir is a beautiful, beautiful place, and a nice respite from the city.

Q: How far away is that from New Delhi?

WEISS: I couldn't tell you in miles.

Q: In those days, when you traveled, several hours?

WEISS: Several hours, I think. We didn't drive. I believe we flew up. Some people would drive.

And we had other vacations in the hill stations.

Another [time] was when we had R and R leave, we could take it in Bangkok or Hong Kong with the children. Those were opportunities to get away, to have a change, to buy clothing and bring back some food from the stores for our own use, and to get a change. Hong Kong was marvelous, as you know.

Q: [Laughter] Yes, I should know, since I'm from Hong Kong.

WEISS: And, of course, India is so far from the other side of the world that whenever we went out and when we returned for good and during our home leave, we literally traveled around the world. We'd go in one direction to get there and the other direction coming back.

Q: I was thinking of the weddings in India.

WEISS: Oh, the weddings are, well, I think not the word “circus,” because they really aren't circuses; but those are beautiful affairs, very complicated, complex, powerful, noisy. We were invited to many of them, as our friends were. The Indians feel honored if they have an American or foreigner come to their weddings.

There was one across the street from us that our son went to. He came back and said, “Guess who I met? I met Prime Minister Shastri (this was after Nehru's death) across the street, at my neighbor's house!”

The Hindu weddings are, as I said, very elaborate. The groom arrives on horseback, all festooned in colorful garb. The horses also. With musicians. Part of the street of the house where the wedding would take place was cut off to traffic. They festooned it with floral gates.

Q: Was it usually at the groom's house or at the bride's house?

WEISS: At the bride's house. The parents of the bride spent thousands and thousands of dollars. Even out in our compound where the servants lived, there was a wedding; and you can imagine how little they had to begin with, but they saved money and spent money for the food and for musicians and dancers for something like a wedding.

Q: And it lasted for days?

WEISS: Yes, yes. I don't think there are any weddings anywhere in the world like those.

Q: I wonder if they still do it that way.

WEISS: I think they probably do.

Q: Was there a problem with Tibetan refugees at the time, also?

WEISS: Tibetan refugees had come into India, well, came with the Dalai Lama, trekked over the mountains. When we lived there, there was a Tibetan settlement in Dharmsala, which was, in effect, their new capital. They had a school there. There were many of them in New Delhi, and there was something called Tibet House in New Delhi. The Dalai Lama would come in and there would be a ceremony of one kind or another. We'd be invited to those things. Many of the Tibetan refugees, who were living in Dharmsala, would come into New Delhi in the winter months, the cooler months, to sell their crafts. Not their crafts, but things that they had brought out of Tibet they were selling. Beautiful old ritual pieces of silver and brass. Things of that kind.

Q: Really!

WEISS: And jewelry and gemstones. Our children became quite interested. There was a woman named Chanda who would come to our house and come in and sit on our living room floor or on the verandah and open up her parcels and bags of things and spread them out. Our children were very interested in not only seeing what she had and buying

some of them — our son got very interested in buying gemstones — but also in talking with her. I recall when our daughter graduated from the school and went back to New York to go to college at Sarah Lawrence, Chanda noticed that Susan wasn't there. And I said, “Oh, yes, I miss her so much, but she's at college and now it's just David at home.” And she expressed to me her feelings about being without her daughter, because she had to be separated from her family. So that was kind of a new connection we had with each other. I felt very close to Chanda in many ways. She had a lovely personality, low-key. She wasn't a hard seller in any way. She was very low-key.

Q: She came from Tibet?

WEISS: She was one who had come from Tibet. Her husband traveled around India buying things to add to what they were selling. She would come to New Delhi in the wintertime and do the selling. Then they would be together later. So she was without her children.

Our son, one year, was invited by a young Peace Corps volunteer to go with him to Dharmsala to see the Tibetan community out there. They had their own school. They had their own rituals for religion and culture. . . . used to tell me about this. They were very. . . . They wanted to carry on, to give back to their children as much of their own culture and history and everything else that they could, although they were no longer in their own country. They knew what was happening to their country, but they wanted their children to know it all, as much as they could. That's something that David learned and was impressed by.

Q: Do you have any idea of how many of these refugees from Tibet were in India at that time? Well, maybe around New Delhi?

WEISS: I don't know offhand. I imagine there were thousands. I think most of them came into India. Some came to the U.S. I met some here. But I think, mainly, the ones with

families, the kind of colony, stayed in India. I suppose some of their leaders were the ones who came abroad.

Q: And they would travel back to Tibet to visit the family?

WEISS: I don't think at that time they were allowed to travel into Tibet.

Q: They weren't.

WEISS: No, I believe not. I think later, China opened it up, and that wasn't too many years ago.

Q: So they really had left the country.

WEISS: They had fled. They were expatriates. Yes, they had left their country, as always, with hope and determination that they could and would go back. I don't know how many have gone back. All those who have gone back must be having a very difficult time.

Q: Oh, no, it seems like you and also your children who enjoyed India.

WEISS: Oh, very much! My husband was the economic counselor and later, minister; and, as was required by him, he made a lot of trips around the country and wanted me to go with him as much as I could. I thought that was a marvelous opportunity to get to know the country and the people and the kind of contacts he had with economic projects around the country. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. In retrospect, I wonder how it affected my children, being away for days on end, off and on all the time. It wasn't that frequent, but I think they understood and wanted me to go. But they were in school.

Q: And you had help at home.

WEISS: We had help. I wouldn't have left them if we hadn't had help. We not only had a staff at the house, but they lived on the property. I believe the bearer would stay in the

house when we were away. We insisted on that. And Len's secretary, Ruth Butler, who had gone out from Washington with him, lived in staff quarters on the embassy grounds itself. She was unmarried, and when we would go on trips like this, I would ask her if she would like to come and stay at the house, and she did. The children knew her, and I felt...

Continuation of Interview - August 21st, 1992.

Q: Mary Louise, we were just talking about your travels with your husband in India, and leaving your children at home, but you did have help and all that. Was there something else you wanted to add?

WEISS: Well, there were some anxieties on my part, leaving the children at home. That they were safe, I wasn't worried about that. They were in good hands. But in perspective, I wondered if it might have affected them adversely. They didn't say anything about it at the time. These were their teen years and pre-teen years, when children are, at least the older ones, drawing away from family in their own way and not talking about everything personal. I just wish that maybe I'd been more available, although I was available. But perhaps it's knowing more now and wishing I'd known it then. I think we did as much as we could at the time for and with them. We wanted to be with them all the time. We couldn't always.

The representational duties or obligations, responsibilities, were very heavy in New Delhi. It was a very large post.

Q: And your husband is in a senior position.

WEISS: Yes, he was the counselor minister, and there were CODELs (Congressional Delegations) from Washington and VIPs visiting all the time. So there was a lot of entertaining going on, not only on our part, in our home, but in other homes and hotels. Receptions, dinners, luncheons. Sometimes several in one day or evening, five or six days a week. We all tried to keep Sundays sacrosanct for the family, but there would be

exceptions. I just feel I wish I could do it over again and do it a little more thoroughly. I think I did a good job.

Q: While you were in India, your father got very ill and passed away.

WEISS: My father was very ill when I left. I think it was when we first left, departing for India, we went up to see him. He was in a wheelchair. He had cancer. He lived in upstate New York. I wouldn't see him that often and, of course, had been away during our foreign service years. I went up to see him, and when we said good-bye, I could tell by the look in his eyes that he knew we wouldn't see each other again. And that hurt me. It crushed me. It tore at my heart. He was very frail, very weak. My mother was there and my younger brother lived in the same area, so I wasn't concerned in that respect; but I felt very badly that we were going so far away because I knew I wouldn't be able to get back easily to visit him.

Q: Were you able to?

WEISS: No, not before he died. We went — I believe it was our first Easter vacation time — went on a trip with the children when they were out of school. We went on a trip to Hyderabad, or some place, with them. Stayed in a beautiful hotel, palace hotel, which had been a former maharajah's palace. A beautiful place. When we arrived, there was a cable that the embassy had forwarded, announcing my father's death, and it upset me very much for the obvious reasons, but I knew that since I was so far away, I wouldn't be able to get back easily and quickly in time for his funeral. I think there was not a compassion leave allowance at the time. If there had been, I didn't know about it and didn't ask about it. I did not get back. Tried to, but it was just so far and with complications to making arrangements to get there it just didn't work out, and so I didn't come back. I'm his only daughter, and so it meant a lot to me that I wasn't able to go back. That's one of those things you have to accept in the foreign service.

On the other end of that scale, I recall, before we went into the service, we were getting to know about it while we were still here, and hearing stories about life in the foreign service. remember one woman told me that they — I believe they were being assigned to India — and both mothers of both the couple were widows, and both of them were going to live with them in India, as dependents. Can you imagine? Two mothers, mothers-in-law, living in this family. I asked her how that worked out. Anyway, I thought that was very interesting.

Q: An interesting situation. Mary Louise, maybe you can tell me a little bit of the change of perspective over the years with the foreign service. The different posts, experience in DC, whatever.

WEISS: Well, looking back, I'm sure the foreign service affected all of us in the family. Our son came into the foreign service himself and was in for 10 years and then left to stay in the job he's in now. Both our children recognized that there were problems, but said they would do it again. They felt it was worthwhile in every wonderful sense. It was worth the hazards and the problems and the sacrifices.

Nowadays, the foreign service families face things that we didn't have to face. Things like terrorism. Although when we were in Bangladesh, after Leonard retired from the service — he was with the World Bank mission there — there were three coups. I don't recall any acts of terrorism in other posts. There were plenty of things that went on during our years in India. I mentioned the war. It was a brief war, but it was a taste of war, a taste of anxiety. I worried about my family at home worrying about me out there. I wish that I had had more professional training myself that I might have used, though I would not change the way I led our lives at post as a mother and wife; and I don't see how I could have done those things if I'd had a career.

I managed to do some writing when I was abroad. Writing's a wonderful career to have. It's very flexible. You can take it with you anywhere, fit it in wherever you want. And I have written quite a bit about it.

Bonn, coming after India — we were posted to Bonn after India — was not only a relief, it was a great contrast. It was sort of going back home in a way because it was a Western, more familiar culture, even the language I was studying. I hadn't studied German before, but it seemed all very familiar. The history was more familiar. My mother's side of the family came originally from Germany in the 18th century. I just felt much closer to it, and I felt very comfortable there. I think we all did. Wonderful opportunities to jump in the car with our cameras on weekends and just drive. You'd see a sign that would say “to the Netherlands” or “to Belgium” a few miles away. We did a lot of traveling with the children. It was easier for our daughter to come from college and visit us there, a shorter distance to get home. But it was a great contrast and a comfortable one. Not that India wasn't comfortable, but there were other kinds of differences that we had to cope with, understand, in India. It seemed much more complex than Germany.

While we were there, President Johnson came to visit. That was a big hullabaloo in many ways. They make so much of these things. The embassies have to, for security reasons.

Q: This was in Bonn.

WEISS: This was in Bonn. The astronauts who had first landed on the moon came to Bonn, as they did in those days after every early space mission. When they returned to earth, the three or four of them world travel abroad, around the world, to visit cities, capitals, usually, and talk about the American space mission. I suppose it was a big PR thing, but they came to Bonn. I remember watching the space mission in our home when there was a landing. How did it work? No, I'm thinking of one, it wasn't a landing on the moon. It was the one prior to that, probably an exploratory one, where they went around the moon. Later, we met the astronaut — Borman? — who was in that, who came to Bonn with his wife and was given all the VIP treatment. At the time, we escorted them. I can't remember. Len wasn't charg# d'affaires, but for some reason we were assigned to escort them. I remember Borman's wife telling me that — I may have asked her the question, what was it like watching your husband on the television, going through this thing? — and

she said, “Well, the hardest part was when they went around behind the moon and they lost radio contact.” You can imagine what that would feel like, not being able to see or hear. Anyway, they came back into radio contact. You can imagine what that would feel like, not being able to see or hear. Anyway, they came back safely.

I remember in Bonn, on several occasions, meeting and perhaps sitting next to a dinner guest, World War II veterans, German veterans who are now high in the ministries, being very reluctant to have the subject of the World War II come up, because they had such guilty feelings about it. Many of them had. . . . I remember one had only one arm. Another had a patch over his eye. They'd been veterans who had suffered a great deal physically, as well as in other ways. Trying to put myself into their feelings. We were the winners of the war, so to speak, and they were winners in the beginning, but not at the end. Their not wanting to talk about it. I think one of them said, “It will take another generation before we can really feel easy to talk about it.” Things like that are impressions.

Q: Were there any surprises over the years?

WEISS: Well, I guess good and bad. Some of the surprises were running a household with servants, which I hadn't been used to. In India there was a staff of five. I wasn't used to that. They were all men. I wasn't used to that.

I tried to change it, as many American women did. We thought this was superfluous. Why did we need two bearers and a cook and a sweeper and so on, and a laundry dhobi to do the laundry and a gardener? We tried to change it, thinking, in our American way, that this would be more democratic; but I came to realize that they were dependent on the American embassy — because we lived in embassy property — they were dependent on us as a family, as with the previous family in that house, and the next one would be. They had quarters on the property. They lived there with their old parents and their young children. If we had fired one of them, or tried to get a job for one of them, which I did try to do with a bearer, it would mean that they would lose their house. They would have to

move. The house was just a one-room affair. Their children would have to go to a different school. They would lose the little community they had of their own out there. We even had a garden for them that was their garden for their vegetables and so on. So I realized that it was like a little community, and even if we could find them a job with another family, they would lose all of that and have to move. It was an upheaval that they didn't want, and I realized they would prefer to stay. So we went along with it. It was a system that seemed colonial and superfluous, but it stayed because there were reasons for it.

It's hard to deal with some of those things. You try to do your best. You're thinking in your own cultural terms, but you have to think in theirs also because you're in their country, and it's their lives that are at stake.

Other surprises, things I didn't expect to happen. I think these are things I expected, I knew about in advance, but didn't realize what they would literally be like when we were dealing with them and living with them. I think the kindness that shows through in different cultures when there's no language connection, the kind of big, human family, you can tell by a smile on a person's face or some little gesture of generosity. The welcoming effort would come from people you really don't know anything about. You're in their country. You were their guests, but it makes you feel part of them because you see this response that's so human and so much like your own.

There's another side to it, too, the poverty and the turmoil, the killing, things of that sort that are distressing; but they happen here, too.

I think possibly another surprise would be the reaction of our children. I remember feeling that we always took with us our American home. We took as much with us as possible in the way of books and records and games and pictures to put on the wall and things of that sort, which made our home as much like home back here as we could. I assumed that we were giving our children an American heritage. When my daughter was older, in her teen years, and I was getting very interested in the effects on our children, I asked her

about that. Did she feel she had a hundred percent American heritage while living there? And she said, “Oh, no!” She said, “That's only part. My heritage is also in Yugoslavia. My heritage is also India.” And that surprised me greatly. I'd never realized that because I was thinking of American heritage on my own terms, my background, my family history; and I assumed we took that and passed it along. But she and David had something that I didn't have, and that was living in these countries where they inherited something that I didn't have. And that was a surprise to me. I had taken all this for granted from my point of view, and she's the one who told me that it was different with her. That was a surprise.

Q: It's very important to recognize the difference.

WEISS: Very important, and I think if it's not done now, I think it's something that the Foreign Service Institute might try to bring out in the orientation for families going abroad, not to take for granted that your own background as an adult is going to be the same you pass along to your children. They will have an entirely different one. And if your children go out earlier, younger, and are born abroad, it would be even more so. Our children didn't go abroad until they were four and eight years old. They'd been born right here in Washington. So I just assumed too much as a mother.

Q: Mary Louise, you've done quite a few interviews for the oral history, the Foreign Service Spouse Oral History program. Tell me a little bit about how you feel about the project as a whole and your experience interviewing different people.

WEISS: Could I go back just a moment to what we were just talking about?

Q: Sure.

WEISS: I don't know if this is a surprise, but one of the wonderful things, positive things, that comes out of the foreign service life style — not so much for us parents, but especially with our children — and that is the global view that they get, that we get. I think in terms globally. I see the world as a globe, as a big map. I'm very geographically oriented. Some

people aren't. I'm pretty sure our children think and feel the same way, and when it comes to things that are going on around the world, we feel a definite connection and so do they from this experience.

The oral history project tempted me right from the beginning, and I stayed with it for about five and a half years now, and I'm phasing out of it. But I found it very stimulating and a wonderful opportunity to stay connected with the foreign service, especially with the women, because it started as a project to interview foreign service women. The name changed to Foreign Service Spouse Oral History so that we could include the male spouses of tandem couples. It is just as important to get the male spouse's point of view as it is to get ours.

Q: Have there been many male spouses in the interviews?

WEISS: I know of at least one. I'm not sure whether Jewel has done others. I haven't seen that interview, but I think it would be very interesting. I know that she did at least one. I'm glad you're in it because I think the more younger wives we have who are interviewers, whether they're doing transcribing or whatever, and we've had some other younger ones who are now posted abroad, it gives us older ones a more inclusive feeling that it's a generational thing that just goes on and on from one generation to the next.

We started interviewing the oldest women we could find, women in their eighties who came into the service very early in the century because we wanted to get their views while they could speak easily and comfortably about it. Then we tried to branch out and get as broad a collection as we could, different age groups, different backgrounds, different perspectives. I have thoroughly enjoyed it.

Q: In your experience as an interviewer, were you every surprised by things that were said by the people you interviewed, compared to your own experience? Was it similar? Was it very different sometimes?

WEISS: I think there have been some. One thing that comes to mind is something that was said to me by a wife who. . . . I was a Wristonee wife. I came in sort of mid-career, in my husband's mid-career period. This other woman married a foreign service officer and they went in, I think, right after school, after his schooling, right after World War II; so she was in longer. There have been several generations of foreign service in her family. When I spoke about being a Wristonee wife and I think I said something to the effect that I didn't feel any different, but I wanted to immediately become one of them. And she said, “Oh, but we always felt superior.” I took it in the best way, but it surprised me, because, again, I just took for granted that — maybe I was just naive — that I came in at a different age and time than those that had come in earlier in their lives, and I wanted to fit in. I'm sure I saw some differences. I think we all respected, pretty much, each other.

In my interviews with other women for this project I have realized how much other women have coped with, some of the things that they've dealt with that were real hardships, much more than I ever had. Longer separations. Children going off or having to be sent abroad or back home to school when they were very, very young. It just made me appreciate how strong and flexible foreign service women are. Made me realize that our experiences were very rich and rewarding, with an amount of problems and stresses, but not nearly as much as many, many women have had to cope with. Naomi Matthews, I think, went into Afghanistan way, way back — did she go in on camel back or something? — alone, without her husband. Long travels by ship in the early days before even we went out by ship were just, at times, very difficult during the war period, World War I, World War II. It was very difficult. Many of them had to go without their husbands. Their husbands had to remain back there, and they were evacuated. We've never been evacuated. I've talked with many women who have. Many have put up with a lot more than I have and come out very strong. Many have had personal and family problems that were very severe, very traumatic, that we haven't had. I felt very fortunate in that respect. It's the luck that we all have or don't have.

Q: Did you travel by boat to Belgrade?

WEISS: Yes, our first travel as a family together by ship was wonderful. It was about ten days altogether. I remember going through a lot of anxiety as we were getting ready to go, not knowing what it would be like. A new kind of life. The children were young. We were having to rent our house and put the furniture in storage and take others with us, and we were wondering if the furniture would come through and our dishes and so on. But I kept thinking to myself while I'm home here doing all these chores, “We will have ten days on ship! I won't have to cook! I won't have to clean house! I won't have to even answer a telephone! It will be like going on a vacation!” And it was! It was marvelous. I worried a little bit about David being four and wanting to fall overboard, but, of course, there was a place where he could play. They ate in separate dining hours. They had an early sitting for the children. One of us would accompany our children at six o'clock, or whatever it was, and there'd be another parent with other children. Then we'd take them back to the stateroom, put them to bed, put on our fancy clothes and go to dinner ourselves.

Q: Oh, sounds like fun!

WEISS: It was a lot of fun. It was very relaxing. There was that feeling of not knowing what was ahead, but being able to enjoy what you were doing at the moment. Then we stopped in Naples. We had our brand new Chevy car with us, and drove from Naples to Florence. We were doing some sightseeing. Then we drove into Belgrade in our own car. That was going from one Western culture into almost an extreme, in some ways. It's a long drive from Trieste down to Belgrade, and we arrived in the dark. There was no place to stop and eat. We couldn't understand the language. I suppose we had to stop and get gas. It all was very, very strange. The children didn't understand it. But anyway, we arrived in our own car.

The trip to India and our home leave trips were also by ship. Going back after home leave from India, Len had to be there at a certain time, and he and David went ahead by

themselves on one ship. I believe I was taking Susan to look at schools. I can't remember why she and I followed later. I think that was the reason, to look at colleges with her. My mother went along with us through New England, looking at girls' colleges. So we went later by ourselves. But traveling by ship was a beautiful thing because it was a nice interlude between leaving home and arriving at your post.

Q: Gives you a little time.

WEISS: On the “Independence” and the “Constitution,” which were the ships that went to the Mediterranean, there were other foreign service and military families. We met them and shared experiences. We were able to eat as much as we wanted, which was another experience for our children. David wanted mashed potatoes at every meal. They couldn't get over the fact that they could order as many desserts. So that was something that I think isn't done any more.

Q: No.

WEISS: We fly in now. I think when we went the second time to India we traveled by plane. The children were older and we stopped in Rome and Cairo and Israel, doing some sightseeing along the way. So there are ways to break the trips now that travel's so much faster. I'm sorry to see the ocean travel out of the picture.

Q: Much more relaxing.

WEISS: But the interviewing has made me appreciate my own experience much more than I think I might have otherwise, and realize that others have had harder experiences. Some have had better experiences, or more glamorous, perhaps. It helps you weigh your own and evaluate it. There's a lot of evaluation that goes on when we listen to others talking about their experiences, comparing your own.

Q: And that's a good way for you also to be connected to the foreign service after your husband retired.

WEISS: Oh, definitely. And I think that was one of the reasons I enjoyed it, because I felt I was still very involved with foreign service in a very different way. I still felt I was very much a foreign service wife. I don't feel we've ever retired. But it's a wonderful way to still feel very connected, to go on and on.

One of the things that you appreciate when you're in a project like this is the value it has historically. What we have been doing is building a history of the women's role in the foreign service. It has changed over the years in many, many ways, in some ways, similar to our society. Society changes also, and you can see how the parallels are, as well as the contrasts, because there are foreign service experiences, or foreign service aspects that we would not experience if we were at home. And I think, as a history project, it will be very valuable to younger people now, scholars. There'll be a book that should be very valuable.

Q: Certainly, it's very interesting for me because I can learn through you, basically, a lot of things that I would. . . .

WEISS: Well, I'm delighted that you're in it and I'm delighted that you're my interviewer.

Q: Thank you.

WEISS: We're a different generation. You came from Hong Kong only 10 years ago! In some ways, this is. . . . I can't say it's typical, but it's one of those unique things in the foreign service that isn't too unique. You're a foreign-born spouse, but you're one of us, and I'm part of your family. I like to think of it, as I said, as a big family. And you're so interested. This enthusiasm spreads. I hope that when you go to Athens and on to other

posts that you'll have some wonderful experiences and still have an interest in the overall perspective of the foreign service.

Q: I'm looking forward to it. Mary Louise, I think it's appropriate at this point to maybe think about Yugoslavia then and now, in view of the fact that you served in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, for a few years, and what is going on now in Yugoslavia. Maybe you have some comments, some insights on this?

WEISS: I can't help but think about it. It's very distressing. It's horrendous what's going on, destroying beautiful Sarajevo and other cities and towns, and the killing. The history of Yugoslavia is very. . . . If you understand a little bit of the history, you can understand what's happening now.

There are five ethnic groups that have been at odds with each other for centuries. When we went to Yugoslavia in 1957, Tito was president. He had been a partisan fighting in World War II with the communist faction. There was another fighter, leader, by the name of Mikhailovic, who was fighting with the Chetniks. These were the two resistance groups that were fighting against the Axis and, of course, Tito won. He was a very strong leader as president and kept these ethnic groups down. He held them down. He's gone, and now they're erupting again with their eternal battles. My heart aches for those who are being persecuted and killed, and I feel great pain for those who are doing the killing, too. We feel more personally and deeply about these kinds of upheavals when we've lived there, and we feel it about other countries where we've lived. And I'm sure other people who've lived abroad feel the same way.

Belgrade was our first foreign service post. We were there with our children. We lived there for three years. We were unable, because of the political situation, to get to know in a friendly way our neighbors or people my husband worked with, the Yugoslavs. But there were Yugoslav local employees in the embassy, the receptionist and so on. Len's driver. We got to know them and felt very warm toward them as they did toward us. Our cook,

Louisa, spoke German. I couldn't speak with her until I learned a little more of the Serbian language. My husband could speak with her. But there was a rapport between Louisa and us and our children that was exceptional. She felt and acted as though she was one of the family without being obvious about it. She was just that warm and comfortable with us as we were with her. She took very good care of us, and so did Mitzi, the maid. She wasn't quite as open about it. She didn't have German as a language. I went into the market with Louisa. She took me to her church services. I visited her in her little home when she was very ill. I took Mitzi to the hospital when she broke her arm. So these were just natural feelings we had.

But there was a barrier between us, a kind of social contact with people that we otherwise would be friendly with, colleagues of my husband in the government and so on. But they're warm, intelligent, caring people. We loved going into the countryside on weekends with our children. We'd take the car and drive out into the country and stop in a village where there was wine to buy and watch them dancing on the green, dressed in their costumes. There was always, on Sundays, wagon loads of singing people on their way to a wedding. People of this sort were very colorful. There was a distance. We couldn't get to know them.

Q: But that still created some certain kind of intimacy with the country.

WEISS: We were very interested to know more about them and learn more. That's what we tried to do, yes. Their culture and their crafts and their music. Had personal with our servants. Our cook and maid and the driver were very warm despite the overall political situation, which required that they report to the police whom we were having for guests and so on. So it hurts very deeply when I see people like them being evicted from their homes and seeing the cities and the towns shelled and bombed by gunfire. I feel the same way about other places where we've lived. Whenever disaster strikes in Bangladesh, floods and hurricanes wipe out their homes and their life work, I feel deeply hurt.

This morning at the swimming pool I was talking to this foreign service friend who asked why I had to leave so hurriedly. I mentioned this interview and what I would be talking about, and I mentioned what's going on in Yugoslavia and how we feel about it. And she said, “Oh, yes! Bill and I felt the same way when Burma was going through its political turmoil a few years ago.” So, after all, those places were our own homes. Both places where we lived were our homes for years when we lived there and so we have this feeling, emotional tie that develops, just as it would if we lived in Chicago or any other place here. And that stays with us and so when we hear in the news and see what's happening on the television, we get very upset. We feel very badly about it. I'm sure that other foreign service people feel the same way.

Q: Well, thank you very much, Mary Louise. I think we have come to the end of our interviews. I certainly have learned a lot from you. It was very interesting to me.

WEISS: Thank you, Monique. You're a very good interviewer

Q: Thank you.

WEISS: I hope you keep it up.

Q: I'll try.

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BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse Entered Service:1956Left Service: 1974You Entered Service:SameLeft Service:

Status:Spouse of Retiree

Posts: 1957-60Belgrade, Yugoslavia 1960-63Washington, DC 1963-67New Delhi, India 1967-68Washington, DC 1968-70Bonn, West Germany 1970-74Washington, DC

Library of Congress

Place/Date of birth: Ithaca, NY 1919

Maiden Name:Barker Parents (Name, Profession):Elmer Eugene Barker, professor & landscape architectEdna Louise Snyder Barker, violinist & poet

Schools (Prep, University): Mildred Elley Secretarial School, Albany, NY; NY State Teachers College, Albany, NY; American University, Washington, DC

Profession: Freelance writer, editor, book reviewer

Date/Place of Marriage: September 21, 1946, Washington, DC

Children:Susan R. Weiss ManesDavid Alan Weiss

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At Post: Belgrade - Board, International School; President American Women's Club; teacher, Protestant Church Group. New Delhi - Secretary, Board and Community Relations committee, American International School; Assistant Editor and contributor Newscircle Magazine; American Women's Club; freelance writer; misc. admin. work at US Embassy; Bonn - Editor, Bonn Journal, American Women's Club

B. In Washington, DC: AFSA Scholarship Review Board; AAFSW (Education committee, Forum, Liaison with State Department Mental Health committee, misc. workshops and seminars, Newsletter editorial board; Mental Health consultant State Department Medical Services; Policy Direction committee, Foreign Service Education and Counseling Center; lay therapist, Episcopal Center for children; Chairman, Writers Group; freelance editor and writer; World Bank Volunteer Services; Foreign Service Spouse Oral History, Inc.

End of Interview